

Jack's Mill Covered Bridge
Henderson County
Near Oquawka, Illinois

HABS Ill.242

HABS
ILL.
36. OQUA.V

1.

Reduced Copies of Measured Drawings

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District No. Ill.1.

Historic American Buildings Survey
Earl H. Reed, District Officer
435 North Michigan Ave., Chicago

COVERED BRIDGE AT JACK'S MILL
HENDERSON COUNTY
NEAR OQUAWKA, ILLINOIS

HABCO
ILL,
36. OQUAWKA

DISTRICT NO. ILL.I.
NORTHERN ILLINOIS

EARL H. REED
DISTRICT OFFICER

Project No. Ill. 242

Ralph F. Gross
H. Stewart Leonard.

SOURCE:

Historical
and
Biographical
Record of
Monmouth and
Warren County
1927, p. 35

On the old state road from Monmouth to Oquawka, Illinois is to be found today this covered wooden bridge which was built in 1845-6. It is the second bridge on this site. The earlier bridge was constructed in 1831 by Francis Kendall, after plans and specifications by James B. Atwood, for the contract price of \$395. Kendall encountered difficulties with the county commissioners and the bridge was finally finished by his bondsman, Jeremiah Smith in 1833. The first bridge lasted until it was swept away by a flood in 1844.

Apparently the second and present bridge was started immediately under the supervision of William Smith. It is a simple and unpretentious covered wooden bridge of the so-called "Lattice" system. The lattice members are of solid black walnut pinned together at the intersection points with white oak pins $1\frac{3}{4}$ " x $4\frac{1}{2}$ " long. The main structural members are of burr and white oak and the siding and shingles of walnut. The bridge rests on abutments of local moundstone.

Mr. Charles
Shell,
Blacksmith
Oquawka

The bridge sagged to such an extent that in the year 1872 it was decided to strengthen it with iron rods and bolts run through wooden pins, which were allowed to remain. This operation took place under the supervision of the builder, William Smith. Mr. Charles Shell, at that time a blacksmith, worked on this job and informed the Survey that this reinforcement was not structurally necessary, it merely reduced the squeaking and allayed the fears of travellers.

The roof was torn off in a storm in 1924 and at that time extensive repairs were made. New siding was put on and a new shingle roof was laid. Concrete piers were added under the bridge in 1929. The new concrete road, replacing the earlier road is State Highway 94 A and runs about a quarter of a mile north of this bridge. It is two miles east of Oquawka.

Oquawka was an early and important town in Illinois, a most important factor in the Mississippi River trade. Road traffic came as far as from Galesburg and was routed over this bridge which was the earliest bridge in this part of the state. Close to the bridge is an early grinding mill which for many years was operated by Captain Alexander T.W. Jacks. His name has been connected with the mill and bridge although he left the community in 1850. There was also a large settlement at this point. The settlers were often discouraged with the floods of Henderson Creek and so they moved to higher ground. The sticky clay roads frequently held up traffic and these roads were said to be the worst in the Illinois Territory. It is said that Horace Greely more than swore at the gumbo and that Abraham Lincoln was often inconvenienced and delayed in passing through this territory.

The preservation of this bridge as well as the Eames covered bridge is due to the active effort of one of the County Commissioners, Mr. L.W. Curtiss.

Peter Cartwright, pioneer Methodist circuit rider, referred to this community as the "devil's half acre", a name which is still used by the older residents, who stoutly maintain that Cartwright was disappointed in that the inhabitants would not stop work on Sunday to attend services.

By

Ralph F. Cross

Approved

Eames covered